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Environment Department Supports Department of Energy Office of Inspector General Findings on Los Alamos Groundwater Well Problems

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) supports the Department of Energy Office of Inspector General's report on Characterization Wells at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and the finding that groundwater samples from some wells are not providing a clear picture of potential groundwater contamination.

The Inspector General's report found that drilling fluids LANL used to drill some of the wells compromised the reliability of data on groundwater contaminants and that LANL did not ensure residual drilling fluids were fully removed before collecting data from the wells. NMED has been working with LANL on addressing these problems and submitted recommendations to improve well reliability earlier this summer.

NMED officials plan to request that LANL submit a full report on which wells may be impacted by these drilling fluids and that it prepare a plan to address those problems. NMED Secretary Ron Curry and Department officials are aware of LANL's efforts to improve their drilling techniques and are supportive of their efforts to use the most up-to-date industry methods to address each well.

"This is why the Consent Order that was signed in March is so important," Secretary Curry said. "We realized that over the years the information we've gotten from the lab hasn't always been as clear or as transparent as we've needed. Now, with the order in place we have the authority to enforce action to ensure that the sampling the lab does is adequate."

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